

SEP 28 1959

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Quick-Changer

K at Close Range

Almost since the moment Nikita Khrushchev set foot on American soil, Benjamin Broderick of NEWSWEEK'S Washington Bureau has been traveling with him, much of the time at his elbow (see arrow in photo). This is his portrait of the volatile Soviet leader.

Up close, Khrushchev is a bewildering kaleidoscope of quick-changing faces.

In the vaulted Lincoln Memorial, he listens to a quote from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address with a blank, almost Oriental stare. Seconds later, there is a sensitive, pensive look as he says softly: "Those are beautiful words."

On the rostrum of the National Press Club in Washington or the Economic Club in New York, this face becomes a caricature of great joviality, as he claps his own hands, Russian style, acknowledging the applause in his honor.

And again, only minutes later, this face explodes, literally contorted by his militant and uncontrolled fury. When audiences laugh, in however friendly fashion, and Khrushchev doesn't know why, his anger is triggered by a fear of being made to look ridiculous. From a few feet away, this fear of being ridiculed can almost be felt. His eyes dart like lightning as he gropes for the information to restore his sense of composure.

He has small, strong, hairless hands, and he keeps them constantly in motion to express his hundred moods: twinking his fingers as he tells a joke, wiggling them in admonition, waving expansively to emphasize a boast, closing his fists to threaten.

From the rear, his broad silhouette is dominated by an Erich von Stroheim neck, which drops without exaggeration from his shining head to his broad back. From the front, the silhouette is all but forgotten, as the hundred faces change over. The wens on the left side of his nose, and on his right cheek are prominent, but not unsightly. His thick eyebrows are emphasized by the fat of his face.

And then all these features disappear, and there is only defiance, laughter.